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SUBJECT: GUINEA-BISSAU FORMS NEW GOVERNMENT AND SCORES
MAJOR DRUG BUST

REF: DAKAR 0381

Classified By: CDA Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (U) Guinea-Bissau has a new consensus government headed by Martinio N,Dafa Cabi, a vice president of the Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC). President Joao Bernardo "Nino" Vieira chose Cabi out of a field of three choices presented by the coalition of parties that voted no confidence in Prime Minister Aristides Gomes. Cabi made a strong start by halting expenditures and calling for fiscal responsibility. He vowed to improve cashew policy and hit corruption and drugs. His vow to address drug trafficking comes after Vieira publicly called on his Government to address the growing problem and after the country,s second largest drug seizure on April 3. Three people are being held for trial in the cocaine bust including two members of the military, one of them extremely close to Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Batista Tagme Na Waie.
END SUMMARY.

MEET THE NEW BOSS

12. (C) New Prime Minister Martinio N,Dafa Cabi told PolOff his priorities were to fight corruption, revamp cashew export policy and bring transparency and responsibility to the Finance Ministry. One of his first acts as Prime Minister on April 16 was to freeze all government expenditures and order an accounting for all transactions since the announcement of the no confidence vote in Aristides Gomes, government on March 19. Cabi said his goal was to get the house in order and restore confidence before asking for any foreign assistance. He put Issufo Sanha, who served as Economy Minister under Gomes, in charge of the Finance Ministry. The move will surely reinforce Cabi,s efforts to bring transparency to the process as Sanha was almost universally considered the star of the Gomes government for his ethics, pragmatism and strategic planning.

13. (C) Reinforcing his message of attacking corruption and drug trafficking, former Defense Minister Helder Proenca was noticeably absent from the goQrnment roster. Proenca,s involvement in the drug trade is an open secret in Bissau.

However, Proenca will continue to wield considerable influence behind the scenes and some candidates in next year,s legislative elections will undoubtedly look to him for campaign financing.

¶4. (C) Cabi also told PolOff he will focus on cashew policy.

Gomes, failed policies caused farmers and the Government major losses last year. He has vowed to negotiate with Indian buyers to address their concerns. The largest, Olam International, closed its operation in Bissau because of harassment to pay bribes by former Finance Minister Mandinga.

Cabi said he will hew to the fair market price instead of setting an arbitrarily high price as the Government did last year.

DRUG SEIZURE AND ARRESTS

¶5. (C) The military doesn,t seem to have time for politics these days for it is reeling after the April 3 seizure of 635 kg. of cocaine. Colonel Rui Flak, a close friend and advisor to General Tagme, a seaman named Augusto Armando Balanta, and civilian Malam Sadio were apprehended transporting the drugs from a rural airstrip to Bissau. Cohorts escaped with the rest of the estimated 2.5 ton shipment because Judicial Police making the arrest did not have enough vehicles or weapons. The traffickers were so confident in the safety of their operation after using the same route undisturbed for so long that they were not even armed to protect their USD 53 million cargo.

¶6. (C) The two soldiers are being held in a military prison and Sadio is in a civilian holding cell. Flak is widely rumored to be the trigger puller in the 2004 death of Tagme,s predecessor, former Armed Forces Chief Verrissimo
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Seabra Correia, a crime which has never been investigated. Under Bissau-Guinean law, all military personnel caught in &flagrante delicto8 must be held in a military prison, but since the men are accused of a civilian crime they will be tried by a civil court.

¶7. (C) Attorney General Jorge Fernando Ribeiro, who in January attended the International Visitor Program entitled &Administration of Justice in the U.S.,8 moved quickly to preserve samples of the seized cocaine and publicly destroy the rest. Samples were passed to Interpol Canada and are also available for U.S. officials. Ribeiro and Eduardo Costa Sanha, President of the Superior Military Court, told PolOff they are collaborating closely to proceed with the trial for the three accused men: all of whom have signed confessions. They understand international observers are watching the case and expect justice to be delivered through fair and transparent trials.

¶8. (C) The operation and subsequent destruction of the drugs would not have been possible without UN intervention. The operation was carried out with a UN photographer present. Shortly after the operation, then presidential security chief (now the Minister of the Interior) Baciro Dabo entered Judicial Police headquarters demanding to take possession of the drugs. He immediately dropped his demands and left when he saw Daniel Ruiz, Deputy to the Representative of the Secretary General, standing guard with police.

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COMMENT

¶9. (C) Perhaps the most important aspect of the change in government is that it happened through peaceful, constitutional means. The military had no apparent role and the capital remained calm through the transition. The new government has less than one year to operate before legislative elections in spring 2008. There is little that can realistically be accomplished in that time, but the climate in the capital is one of cooperation given the collaborative way in which the Gomes government was brought

down. However, as is usually the case in Bissau-Guinean politics, the Government will probably dedicate much of its energy to getting its members elected next spring. In terms of cashew policy and corruption, almost any steps taken would be improvements over the past government.

¶10. (C) It appears the police action was instigated by the police and UN. Its success shows there are still honest, dedicated people in the police, judiciary, and even the military who are interested and capable of fighting drug trafficking. However, their resources remain extremely limited and their personal safety is constantly in jeopardy. The UN had to buy the gas for the police vehicles. Post submitted a request to provide a counter-narcotics police official to UNODC in Bissau (reftel). If the position were funded, the officer could provide similar support to Bissau-Guinean police in future operations. The UNDP says it is now ready to contribute as much as USD 100,000 if the U.S. can provide a person for the position. END COMMENT.

¶11. (U) Visit Embassy Dakar's SIPRNet site at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/af/dakar>.
JACKSON